

CODE-SWITCHING USED BY ECONOMIC DEPARTMENT: BRIDGING LANGUAGE BARRIERS FOR INTERNATIONAL CLASS STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

As an international language, English is often being taught or used in schools or universities in Indonesia. There are also some bilingual or international classes where the teaching and learning process mostly uses English as the main language. In this class setting, students are usually expected to communicate using English and understand the learning material taught in English. This study investigates the use of code-switching in international classes of the Faculty of Economic and Business, focusing on factor of code-switching and its effects on students' understanding. The research used a descriptive qualitative method involving open-ended questionnaires. The participants were 49 international class students from the second and fourth semesters in Universitas Pekalongan. The results showed that factors of code-switching by students were limited English proficiency, difficulty understanding economic terms, and the need to emphasize important points. Code-switching helped students understand complex material, improve vocabulary, and feel more confident, but it also gives challenges such as slowing down English development and causing confusion when overused. Overall, code-switching played an important role in bridging language barriers in bilingual or multilingual classroom settings.

Key Words: Code-switching, International Class, language Barrier, Student understanding

ABSTRAK

Sebagai bahasa internasional, bahasa Inggris sering diajarkan atau digunakan di sekolah maupun universitas di Indonesia. Terdapat pula beberapa kelas bilingual atau internasional yang proses belajar mengajarnya sebagian besar menggunakan bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa utama. Pada kondisi kelas seperti ini, siswa biasanya diharapkan dapat berkomunikasi menggunakan bahasa Inggris dan memahami materi pembelajaran yang diajarkan dalam bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan alih kode (code-switching) di kelas internasional pada Fakultas Ekonomi dan Bisnis dengan fokus pada faktor penggunaan alih kode dan dampaknya terhadap pemahaman siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan kuesioner terbuka. Partisipan adalah 49 mahasiswa kelas internasional dari semester dua dan empat di Universitas Pekalongan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa faktor yang membuat mahasiswa menggunakan alih kode adalah terbatasnya kemampuan bahasa Inggris, sulit memahami istilah akademik terutama istilah khusus ekonomi dalam Bahasa Inggris, dan untuk penekanan poin-poin yang penting. Alih kode membantu siswa dalam memahami materi yang kompleks, memperkaya kosakata, dan meningkatkan rasa percaya diri, namun juga menimbulkan tantangan seperti memperlambat perkembangan bahasa Inggris dan menyebabkan kebingungan jika digunakan secara berlebihan. Secara keseluruhan, alih kode memainkan peran penting dalam menjembatani hambatan bahasa dalam pengaturan kelas bilingual atau multibahasa.

Kata Kunci: Alih kode, Kelas Internasional, Hambatan Bahasa, Pemahaman Siswa

INTRODUCTION

Language is a part of human culture that plays a significant role in society. It connects people worldwide so that they can communicate or understand each other easily. Language can be used as a medium or tool in more specific areas such as academics, business, medicine, politics, or other things. Although there are so many languages, people can still overcome this by learning them. By mastering more than one language, people may have more chances to understand other thoughts or feelings.

Many people have already familiar in using two or more languages in their society, though some of them may be not. The person's ability to communicate in two languages can be called bilingualism, (Özşen,

Çalışkan, Önal, Baykal, & Tunaboşlu, 2020). Bilingual people usually shift between their first and second languages. This thing can be called as code-switching. Morrison (2025) defines code-switching as changing or switching from a particular code of speech (language or dialect) to a different code based on the social setting or conversational situation. Bilinguals often switch languages subconsciously, using words or phrases from other languages to convey their ideas better. They sometimes do not find the proper word or phrase in the first language, switching it to their second language. Moreover, sometimes people switch their language in the conversation to emphasize the necessary things. This code-switching phenomenon can happen in casual or formal situations, including in a classroom or academic setting.

As an international language, English is often being taught or used in schools or universities in Indonesia. There are also some bilingual or international classes where the teaching and learning process mostly uses English as the main language. In this class setting, students are usually expected to communicate using English and understand the learning material taught in English. However, sometimes students have difficulty understanding or presenting English material since it is not their first language. (Ennin & Manariyo, 2023), state that English can be challenging because of the different tones, so students can have some difficulties understanding the communication or lessons from the lecturers or classmates. Sometimes the students, teachers, or lecturers code-switch their conversation between English and Indonesian or even local languages so that the learning material can be delivered and understood well.

Using code-switching during the learning process in class sometimes helps the students and teacher to minimize the language barrier. According to (Friedman, 2023), a language barrier is when there is a lack of a common language that makes people limit their conversation or understanding by using verbal communication. Hence, language barriers can make students have difficulties understanding the lessons, especially when English is considered as a foreign language.

This study explained how code-switching overcomes the language barriers between the lecturer and students in the class. That class is a new program from Pekalongan University, the International Class in Economic Department. There are only two classes right now, and all of the students are still from local people. The students are quite fluent in English, but since it is not their first language, they may have difficulties in understanding some part of the lessons. Therefore, lecturers and students sometimes switch their language from English to Indonesian language during class.

Based on that phenomenon, the researcher aims to identify the factor of code-switching and the effects of code-switching on students' understanding of the material in international class. This study is important because it can help us, as bilinguals, to understand that language flexibility may affect the learning process. It also may help the lecturers and students to develop better teaching and learning strategies in that international class, such as using code-switching to minimize the language barriers. Both students and lecturers may not notice how code-switching plays quite an important role during class. If code-switching in this class is ignored, it may affect the teaching and learning process, making the class less effective.

Several studies discussed code-switching in the class. One example is a research article by (Yolanda, 2020) entitled "Code Switching in English as A Foreign Language (EFL) Classroom". The goal of this study aimed to show the use and function of code-switching in EFL classrooms. Moreover, other previous studies also explained the use, the reasons, and the functions of code-switching in the class. This study

will identify the effects of code-switching and use descriptive qualitative methods as the bridge of language barriers in students' understanding of the material. The researcher hopes this study can contribute to linguistics and education by exploring this issue, especially at Universitas Pekalongan.

METHODOLOGY

This research used a descriptive qualitative method involving open-ended questionnaire. The purpose was to analyze factor of code-switching and the effects of code-switching on students' understanding of the material. The study was conducted in two international classes in Universitas Pekalongan. The subjects of this research was 49 international class students from the second and fourth semesters. Data collection techniques involved an instruments: open-ended questionnaires. The questionnaire was distributed to students to gather insights about the factor and effects of code-switching on their understanding. All data were analyzed through qualitative data analysis techniques, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, as proposed by Miles and Huberman in (Zubaidi 2012). Questionnaire responses were grouped into thematic categories reflecting effects of code-switching as experienced by students.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Factor of Code-Switching on Students' Understanding

Table 1. Factors of Code-Switching

No	Factor Identified	Example of Student Response
1	Limited vocabulary and English proficiency	"Not really fluent in English, still beginner level."
2	Difficulty understanding academic or economic terms in English	"I don't understand the certain economic terms in English."
3	Lecturer explains complex theories and calculation	"Usually when we learn accounting or complex theories."
4	To understand material better	"I can understand the material better."
5	To emphasize important points	"To highlight important points or assignments"
6	Student shows confused facial expression	"When students look confused, the lecturer switches to Indonesian language"
7	To get more focus and less anxious	"It feels more relaxed so I'm not afraid to ask questions."
8	Feel more comfortable because of first language	"Yes, it's comfortable using Indonesian language."

There were factors that contributed to the use of code-switching in the class, particularly in an international economics department class. Based on the students' questionnaire responses, several factors were consistently mentioned as influencing the use of code-switching.

One of the most common responses from students was a limited English vocabulary and proficiency, especially when it comes to academic or economic terms. Because students' English skills are not yet fluent, the teacher often uses Indonesian or a local language to convey meaning effectively, (Novitasari,

Erlina, & Sukma, 2022). Some students were already quite proficient in English, but others were not. They usually understand the lecturer's explanation, but still have difficulties speaking English because they lack vocabulary. For students, speaking is considered a complex skill because many struggle to express their ideas clearly, (Murti, Jabu, & Samtidar, 2022). Therefore, students used code-switching as a way to bridge this problem, although some of them still used fully Indonesian language.

Another factor was the complexity of the material, particularly regarding theories, formulas, or calculations, which allowed the students to understand the material better. The students not only learned English as a language, but they also acquired knowledge of management and various economic concepts through English. It would make them think twice. In the classroom situation, the first language is often used for the teaching and learning process, such as explaining complex concepts, comparing languages, ensuring vocabulary, or discussing new and specific material (Makulloluwa, 2013). Students mentioned that they needed to code-switch their language to understand the material better, especially when there were topics about calculations, such as accounting, finance, statistics, taxes, and many more. It could also involve learning about topics related to pawnshop, sliding rates, bond value and etc.

Based on the students' opinion, the lecturer often used code-switching when emphasizing important points in material or giving some instructions for assignments. According to Herawati & Fitriani (2021), through their observation in class, it could be seen that the teacher used code-switching to highlight certain things for example in managing the class disruptions. In this international management class, the lecturer usually gave instructions in English before switching to Indonesian. It was to ensure that all students understood the instructions as a task.

In addition, students also mentioned that their facial expressions, especially when they feel confused during the learning process, can be observed by the lecturers. This factor made the lecturers to immediately switch the language so that the students would understand the lessons better. Moreover, this factor was related to another one, lecturers sometimes needed to use code-switching so that students could focus more and felt less anxious in class. When students made confused facial expressions, it could mean that they were also lacking focus. One of the reasons was that they did not understand the lessons. And then switching to the Indonesian language was needed. Students also often felt anxious whenever they tried to give a presentation or during a question-and-answer session. This feeling was because they were not fluent enough in English to speak English fluently. Therefore, whenever lecturers were permitted to use the Indonesian language as well, they would switch some words, phrases, or even sentences into the Indonesian language to feel less anxious.

The last crucial factor was emotional comfort. Students felt more comfortable switching to the Indonesian language because it is their native language. They felt relaxed when lecturers used the Indonesian language, especially those in their first year. First-year or second-semester students did not adapt well to the English-speaking class environment. Few of them were already proficient at English speaking, but the others often asked the lecturer to use Indonesian, saying, "Can I answer using Indonesian?" While in the second year or fourth semester, students are more usual to answering in English, although a few of them still use it occasionally. This factor made the students more comfortable with code-switching from English to Indonesian. Learners engage in code-switching from English to their first language when they struggle to find the right words in the English language. This helps them maintain the conversation and avoid interruptions due to linguistic or language barriers, (Greggio & Gil, 2007)

All of those was several factors of using code-switching in international class. Several factors contributed to the use of code-switching in the international class. Those factors affected students' understanding of the material. Whenever the students felt one of those factors, they needed to use code-switching in order to understand better. Those factors indicated that the use of code-switching was one of the strategies employed to break down language barriers since many of them were still adapting to English as a medium of the learning process. As many students were still adapting to English as a medium of instruction, code-switching became a helpful bridge to ensure that important content was understood.

Effects of Code-Switching on Students Understanding

Table 2. Effects of Code-Switching

No	Effect Identified	Example of Student Response
1	Helps understand difficult material, especially calculation or abstract topics	"It helps me understand accounting or tax better."
2	Improve new vocabulary especially the economic terms	"When switching to Indonesian language, I will know the translate of certain terms."
3	Increases focus and engagement in class	"It makes me stay engaged and not feel lost."
4	Increases confident of student because of feeling supported	"It makes me feel more confident to ask questions."
5	Help the presentation and question answer session	"It helps me during the questions and answer in presentation."
6	Can make English development slow down	"It makes me rely too much on Indonesia."
7	Causes confusion when switching too often	"Sometimes I get confused when the lecture switches too much."
8	Considered less effective by students who prefer full English	"It's an international class, so I prefer using full English."

Using code-switching during class had some effects on the students, whether positive or more likely negative. Code-switching helped comprehension and vocabulary learning. Most students were helped when lecturers code-switched their language in explaining lessons. It facilitated a better understanding of difficult material, especially in calculations or abstract economic topics. The lecturers often switched to the Indonesian language when defining theories, giving examples, and explaining mathematical formulas. This would help students to comprehend the material. According to (Cahyani, Courcy, & Barnett, 2018), code-switching can be applied to help students gain a better understanding and have more opportunities to participate in discussions. This practice also helped them acquire new vocabulary, especially academic terms. When the lecturer introduced some terms in English but then explained them in Indonesian, students could take notes on the vocabulary in both languages. Thus, it could improve students' vocabulary.

Another effect of using code-switching during the learning process was improved engagement in class, increased student confidence, and engaged interaction during presentations. As stated previously, the factor of code-switching was that students needed it to get more focus and engaged with the class. Many students were already feeling this way; several of them felt that code-switching improved class engagement. Then, it also reduced their anxiety and helped them become more confident in expressing

their answer or opinion. Students could interact more freely when they used code-switching, whether to communicate with lecturers or other friends during the presentation. It was understandable because English is not their first language, but rather a foreign language. Using one's first language in an EFL class setting is crucial for increasing students' participation, enabling them to contribute fairly to the class, (Al-khamisi & Sinha, 2022).

Despite these benefits, a few students expressed concern that frequent code-switching could hinder their progress in the English language. According to According to Setati et al. (2016), students have few opportunities to expand their English vocabulary, so teachers need to use English and serve as language models for the learners. Some students thought that, as International class students, they needed to immerse themselves in an environment that supported their use of English for class matters. These students believed that relying too heavily on their first language could hinder their English vocabulary enrichment, potentially slowing their ability to overcome the language barrier.

Moreover, these students reported that excessive code-switching between languages was confusing, especially when done without a clear pattern. These few students felt confused about where to put their focus because the code-switching was too much. In addition, students who prefer full English considered too much code-switching was not good. They believed that using only English was better in class because it allowed them to improve their fluency in the language. Moreover, some of them mentioned that it was okay to do more code-switching into the Indonesian language at the beginning. However, by the third year, students should use English more fully, as they are known as the international class.

Code-switching had specific effects on the students' understanding. Most students mentioned code-switching as a great strategy to break down language barriers. It allowed them to switch to the Indonesian language and understand the lessons better. However, a few students also considered that using too much code-switching or even more Indonesian language than English could slow down the improvement of their English skills, as it did not align with the concept of being in an international class.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that various factors made the students using code-switching in the international class. Those factors were limited English vocabulary and proficiency, difficulty understanding academic or economic terms, the complexity of the material, and the need to create a more relaxed classroom atmosphere. Code-switching was also often used when lecturers noticed students' confusion or wanted to emphasize important points. These factors reflect a significant language barrier that students experience in international classes. Code-switching also played a significant role in helping students understand complex material in international classes. It helped students understand difficult topics, enhanced vocabulary learning, improved engagement and confidence. On the other hand, too much code-switching sometimes led to confusion and slowed down students' English development. Thus, code-switching played role as a bridge to overcome language barriers so that they can understand the material better but it also should be managed so that it won't interfere the students' improvement in English skills. For future research, it is recommended to explore the long-term impact of code-switching on language proficiency and to compare its use across different academic disciplines or student proficiency levels to gain deeper insights.

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